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Whitworth could have given the Soviets the edge in a war

By Bill Gertz
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Convicted spy Jerry Whitworth caused "unprecedented" national security damage to U.S. Navy communication and intelligence programs that could have helped the Soviet Union win a war between the superpowers, according to the director of naval intelligence.

"It is important . . . to understand how Radioman Senior Chief Jerry Whitworth's violation of his trust as a member of the elite fraternity of naval communication professionals has resulted in unprecedented damage to the Navy and the nation," Rear Adm. William O. Studeman wrote in a court memorandum in the Whitworth case released last week.

Whitworth was sentenced to 365 years in prison last week by a federal judge in San Francisco for his role in passing U.S. naval secrets to the Soviet Union.

He was the fourth person convicted of espionage in the Soviet spy ring that was led by John A. Walker Jr. and included two members of the Walker family. John Walker and his

son Michael are scheduled to be sentenced Oct. 3 in Baltimore. Arthur Walker, John Walker's brother, is serving a life sentence for his role in the espionage ring.

The affidavit by Adm. Studeman provides the first details on the U.S. Navy's assessment of the spy ring's damage.

Naval intelligence analysts have concluded "that Walker-Whitworth espionage activity was of highest value to the intelligence services of the Soviet Union, with the potential — had conflict erupted between the two superpowers — to have powerful, war-winning implications for the Soviets," Adm. Studeman stated in the 12-page memo.

The admiral outlined three types of information U.S. officials believe were compromised by Whitworth: the location and movements of Navy ships and submarines, strategic naval operations plans, and "special category" information.

Ship movement information, Adm. Studeman wrote, is a closely held secret because knowledge of where Navy vessels are located would make them vulnerable to en-

emy or terrorist attacks, or could render U.S. naval attacks ineffective.

"For example, during the Vietnam era, compromises of this type of information could have been responsible for ineffective airstrikes, downed aircraft, abandoned targets and infantry losses," the memo said.

Whitworth was convicted of espionage offenses dating back to 1974, before the end of the Vietnam War.

Knowing the U.S. Navy's operational strategy would allow the Soviets to develop a broad counter-strategy or frustrate Navy operations by feeding "misleading" disinformation into Navy intelligence collectors, Adm. Studeman wrote.

Adm. Studeman stated that Whitworth met John Walker two to four times a year from 1976 to 1985 when he gave Walker 25 to 50 rolls of exposed film containing "photographed key material" — vital for decoding Navy communications.

Whitworth also compromised "detailed plans" for communicating through the National Command Authority — the wartime communications network used for launching nuclear attacks, Adm. Studeman said.